

NEW INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE FISHING

Wisconsin's 132-year-old fish management program took steps in 2005, and plans more in coming years, to strengthen its core program to better conserve and enhance Wisconsin fish populations and to provide you with better, expanded fishing opportunities. Short summaries of a few key advances are provided below, along with links to Web pages where more information is available for some of them.

Long overdue renovation of Wisconsin's flagship hatchery gets underway

Paid for entirely with federal Sport Fish Restoration grants, Fox River Natural Resource Damage Assessment funds from paper mills, Salmon Stamp and your fishing and hunting license fees, construction work should begin in fall 2006 on major renovations to the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery. This deteriorating, turn-of-the-century facility produces trout, salmon, walleye, muskellunge, northern pike and lake sturgeon for statewide stocking. The renovations will enable the hatchery to meet all current environmental regulations and expand production. Without this renovation, stocking of these species would have to be significantly reduced.

For more information: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/wildrose/>

Stocking improvements seek to boost survival of stocked muskies

Using the latest genetics science, we have developed an updated muskellunge broodstock management plan to improve the longterm survival of stocked fish, and hence, the efficiency of the hatchery system. We used input from UW-Steven Point geneticist Dr. Brian Sloss and from a technical committee of fisheries biologists, researchers and anglers to develop the plan. One result will be changes starting this spring in the timing of egg collections, the number of fish spawned, egg handling protocols and characteristics of broodstock lakes. Newly initiated studies will examine genetic differences among past and present broodstocks. For more information:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/fish/musky/index.htm>

Initiatives underway to improve lake and brook trout populations in Lake Superior

DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently completed a brook trout restoration plan for Lake Superior and tributaries to improve brook trout populations. Habitat improvement, stocking, regulation changes, and watershed land use planning are already underway. DNR and the Red Cliff and Bad River Chippewa Tribes also completed negotiations on a new 10-year state-tribal fishing agreement. The state and tribes have avoided litigation on Lake Superior fisheries over the years by developing agreements that control commercial and sport fishing for lake trout in Lake Superior. Management efforts have been a major success as lake trout populations have increased dramatically – to the point that they are totally self sustaining in the Apostle Islands area. For more information:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/gmu/superior/Fish/Fish.html> & <http://www.wnrmag.com/stories/2005/dec05/fish.htm>

Initiatives underway to improve trout fishing in southwestern Wisconsin streams

DNR is cooperating with Trout Unlimited and neighboring states to undertake a regional trout habitat restoration project for the driftless areas of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois. The project, called TU DARE (Driftless Area Restoration Effort), has received significant initial funding from the National Fish Habitat Initiative and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to support staff work among agencies and local governments to restore habitat. The project should benefit the existing DNR trout stamp funded trout habitat improvement program by providing additional funding and technical assistance. For more information:

http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/fish/pages/fishingreport/Driftless_report_042005.pdf

Milestone reached in rebuilding yellow perch fishing in Green Bay

The Natural Resources Board approved a modest increase in the daily sport fishing bag limit from 10 to 15, effective May 20, 2006, and in the commercial quota from 20,000 to 60,000 pounds per year. DNR dropped sport bag and harvest limits in 2001 after a 90 percent decrease in yellow perch between 1988 and 2000 because of poor natural reproduction. The limits have offered protections to that 1998 year-class that have enabled those fish to reproduce and help start rebuilding the fish population and fishery. Fall surveys showed that yellow perch numbers in Green Bay continue to rebuild. We saw the largest hatch on record in 2003 and though these fish have not survived as well as previous year classes, adult numbers continue to increase. Also a UW-Madison study of cormorant diets completed this spring shows that while cormorants do eat yellow perch, they are also feeding heavily on gizzard shad, white suckers, and exotic round gobies. For more information:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/news/on/2005/on050111.htm#art4>

Actions to continue outstanding fishing on Lake Michigan

A record-setting 2005 chinook salmon harvest by our Wisconsin anglers continued a fourth consecutive year of fantastic fishing. Hoping to continue the good fishing, and concerned by signs indicating chinook may be outstripping their forage base, Wisconsin and other states surrounding Lake Michigan have agreed to reduce chinook stocking by 25 percent starting in 2006. Wisconsin will reduce its stocking by 21 percent, or by about 300,000 fish, as its share of the total reduction. Michigan will decrease its stocking 30 percent, Illinois 17 percent and Indiana 12 percent. This should ensure that the salmon and trout we stock have ample forage and will survive and help continue the outstanding fishing. For more information:

<http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/fish/lakemich/index.htm>

Broadening monitoring for better decision-making

Fisheries crews started monitoring fisheries populations on a broader, more uniform basis to collect baseline data on the health of fisheries and other aquatic communities in lakes, rivers and streams. Previously, DNR's monitoring program focused mainly on high quality or poor quality waters, or those waters where a fish manager wanted to answer a specific question to help make a management decision. For instance, by sampling lakes during the same time of year, when water's at the same temperature and using the same gear and sampling procedures statewide, DNR will be better able to compare results across waters. We've also identified classes of important waters which will all be sampled periodically to build a comprehensive data set for each water.

Building a more focused management program for the future

The habitat protection and lake partnership functions that were previously in our integrated Bureau of Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection are being moved to the Watershed Management bureau. Our fisheries program will continue into the 21st century as the Bureau of Fisheries Management with fisheries biologists, technicians, hatchery and operations staff focusing on producing healthy fish populations and great fishing. We'll still be part of DNR's Water Division to maintain the integrated management, but as a separate program. The change means more consistent and efficient delivery and operation of core fisheries management services such as stocking, regulation development and habitat improvement projects. – *Mike Staggs, fisheries director, Madison*